

“Trusting in Christ, Not Money”

(Luke 16:1-15)

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 22nd, 2013

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Last Sunday we heard about the parables of what was lost: lost sheep which picture us sinners who wander from the Lord (thank God the Lord seeks us and finds us); and the lost coin picturing the faithful woman (the church/the bride of Christ) seeking those who wander and become lost and which coins/Christians are entrusted into the care of the faithful church.

But why do we get lost to begin with? The answer is through our own sin, the evil influences of the world, and on account of the adversary, the devil. *But* in the context of our Gospel this morning in Luke 16 (and in other sections of Luke), we disciples (like the original disciples being addressed in this section) are given a major head’s up on a *key* reason/threat that leads to getting lost and for that matter giving reason as to why the church would not concern herself (a terrible sin) for the lost. The reason is money. And our Lord Jesus is teaching a very basic – and yet profound and critical lesson – that we must learn: you can’t have two masters:

- 1) You will either love money and possessions and be attached to them.
- OR
- 2) You will love God and His mercy in Christ and be attached to Him.

But the Lord teaches us in many ways that people get lost from God and stray from how life should be really lived (i.e. following the Lord) because of money and possessions. Early on in Luke’s Gospel we read this:

Luke 8:14: “And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

Even one who hears and apparently receives the Gospel of Christ, can become distracted by “the cares and riches and pleasures of life,” and they can get lost, and many do. How often dear Christians are we consumed by these things: either on the one hand, so afraid and worried because we do not have enough money; or so consumed by all that we can get when there is much money. After a while, it is the money that we carry in our minds and hearts,

and not the Lord. We get lost and we do as the servant in today's parable did: we start "wasting" our lives and neglect the proper use of God's gifts.

Hear the words of wisdom from Proverbs 30:7-9 (NIV): ***"Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."***

The Proverb is not saying that a Christian cannot be materially rich nor materially poor, but he is cognizant of the tremendous temptations and distractions that accompany one or the other situation.

So again Jesus taught in the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 12:33-34: "Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

God is clear on this matter and He lovingly warns you and me:

1st Timothy 6:6-10: Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment. For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."

Again, don't take this mean that a believer cannot have money and possessions. It is not money itself that is the root of all evil, but the *love* of money. Abraham, King David, and rich Zacchaeus in Luke 19 were materially rich and they were also rich towards God. What counts is who you serve and what you do with God's gifts; what you do with the money. If you love God by His grace, then money is used to glorify God and to help your neighbor period. In the meantime, we will be given opportunities to test where our hearts are at (these opportunities can be humbling, but powerful reminders of what is really important):

In 1993 there was a devastating fire in Laguna Beach. 366 gorgeous homes went up in smoke. One of those homes belonged to a former pastor of Saint Paul's, Rev. Roy Gesch. This man of God had been extraordinarily blessed in his ministerial career. He had a rich library and a remarkable collection of missionary artifacts and invaluable symbols of the faith; and of course, he and his wife Dorothy had been extraordinarily blessed with a beautiful home. In 1993 they lost everything in that fire. All of those precious possessions that contained not only substantial monetary value, but inestimable sentimental value and real ministerial value...all of these were gone in a matter of hours. I got to know Pastor Gesch when I served Saint Paul's in Laguna Beach. I was struck by his genuine and faithful response to that fire: he did not undervalue what he lost: they were precious gifts from God; and he and his wife knew the pain of loss, *but* he also knew a profound joy that his real life, the real inheritance, his real meaning was bound up in none of the things that were lost. He knew the Lord had promised Him riches in heaven and even marveled at how the Lord provided for him and Dorothy anew in their life after the fire. He was rich in faith and was not crippled by that fire.

I experienced a similar testimony in Texas. Jerry Kirkpatrick who had been so blessed in material possessions had the rude awakening one day that his immaculate home was in flames. Jerry -- who is now in heaven like Pastor Gesch -- was so humble that he would never tell me about his radiant reaction that day. The story had to come from his daughter. She told me what she saw in her dad that day of the fire. He was horribly upset, but his reaction really had nothing to do with the gorgeous house itself. He was upset because at first he didn't know where his family was. But when he found them, his wife and children, he was overjoyed and relieved beyond words...and the house (though that too was a precious gift from God), did not rob his joy and relief. Everything was going to be alright, because Jerry had what was really important. His daughter learned something that no pastor would be able to convey better than her dad did that day: learn to love what is really important in life, and it isn't our possessions, it isn't our money!

But even the church can get confused about these things. There is an ancient document called the *Didache* ("Teaching") known by its longer title: "*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles.*" This Christian composition was written prior to A.D. 120 and is so impressive that it was considered by the early church as a candidate for inclusion into the New Testament canon (it was almost included in the Bible). It is a valuable early work in the tradition of the Church. In this work, there is a section concerning teachers, apostles, and prophets. There are signs given to warn the church as to how a false prophet/teacher may be recognized. The *Didache* says simply, "***if he ask money [sic.], he is a false prophet*** (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol 7, p 380)." Why would the Lord also teach His bride to be as the woman seeking the lost coins? Answer: because the church is also distracted by the things of this world – money and possessions – and

can forget what is really important in the holy ministry: love God and His mercy in Christ, and so seek the lost! We are blessed to be able to seek our own home as a church, our own facilities and in this process we must be cognizant of our resources, our money, *but* at the same time, let us keep our eyes on what is most important: seeking the lost, proclaiming the Gospel that gathers sinners into salvation.

This is what Jesus was getting at in today's parable. Jesus commends the dishonest servant or manager not for his dishonesty (in fact at 16:8 he is not putting down the disciples, but is commending them because they don't play the deceitful games that the unrighteous are so good at playing... "the sons of the world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light"...Christians are to be innocent when it comes to these ways of the world), but Jesus commends the dishonest manager for his quality of prudence.

Prudence is "cleverness and skill deployed in self-preservation (Just, *Luke*, 616)." Jesus was not telling his disciples to be dishonest, but He was telling them (and through Scripture, telling us) to be prudent, but the question is "prudent about what?"

The parable about this manager is about his job and the desperate prospect confronting him of losing everything. The manager is facing judgment and he is silent before his master. His silence said this (*Concordia Journal*, Vol 24, Number 3, July, 1998, 289):

1. I am guilty.
2. The master knows I am guilty.
3. My disobedience against the master has brought judgment upon me.
4. I cannot get my job back by offering excuses.

We are to relate to this servant not in regards to his dishonesty and worldly manipulation, but in these two respects that are about prudence, the spiritual prudence of disciples and children of God:

1. His utter conviction of his Master's judgment. Don't wait, be quick and be clear: you are a sinner and you are in a desperate situation...you need God, not money! And...
2. His utter conviction of his Master's mercy. There is only one solution, you must go outside of yourself and depend not on money which turns to dust, but you must depend on the only true riches in life: that is Jesus and His gifts to you of His Word, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion to keep your faith alive in Christ and to know what is really important in life!

How could this manager possibly get away with what he did (wheeling and dealing as he did, reducing what was owed to the Master by his debtors)? He must have known: His Master was so merciful; so gracious, and His reputation to be such was renown. Everyone in the town, all of the debtors knew: they could fall upon and trust in the mercy and grace of the Master.

Loving and serving money and possessions leads to wasting life and getting lost. Loving and serving the Lord – the result of His finding you, and showering you with grace upon grace with the forgiveness of sins through His blood and eternal life through His glorious resurrection – is what leads you to know real life, so as to be found, not lost; so as to be able to see, and not be blind; and so as to be truly rich in the riches that never fade, that can't be destroyed in fires, and that are kept in heaven for you and already are now yours.

With this proper view of things and propelled by the grace of God, we take on a new relationship with money and possessions. This re-start mission of Saint Paul's which is now almost 2 ½ years old has not once – thus far – asked you for money beyond the regular offering with the exception of helping those in need outside of this congregation either struck by natural disasters or missionary needs or to support the greater Church in Her mission to the world. Why? Because by God's grace who has given us everything and more that we need for this body and life, and in giving us the Kingdom has poured out every spiritual blessing, we have received a new view about money. It is to be used to bless those around us. It is to be used to prove that we are not attached to it, but know the right way to use it. We know, because Jesus has given every penny we have and at the same time calls us to love Him over and above what He grants us to have...they are good gifts, but one day they will be gone, but we will have the Lord forever! So let's serve Him who gave us everything He had, even His life so you and I would have life, real life, in Him!